Current and Future Roles and Needs of Seniors' Centres in Alberta

Report of the Seniors' Centres Study Group

May 2002

A partnership project

SENIORS ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR ALBERTA

ALBERTA COUNCIL ON AGING

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Seniors' Centres Study

June 6, 2002

Honourable Stan Woloshyn
Minister of Alberta Seniors
Legislature Office
425 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue, NW
Edmonton, Alberta
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Dear Minister:

We are pleased to present to you, and the Government of Alberta, our report on Seniors' Centres in Alberta. Our Study Group focused on the current and future roles and needs of seniors' centres in Alberta. This report brings together information that we have gathered from a survey of seniors' centres across the province, focus groups in eight communities and a review of the literature. We have developed a number of recommendations that address the findings of our study.

Our research confirms the important role played by seniors' centres in the overall continuum of services for seniors in their local communities. Our research also indicates that seniors' centres are well placed to respond to the needs of a growing aging population.

However, we have identified some areas that we believe require review and action by seniors' centres, municipal governments and the Government of Alberta. In particular, our recommendations address assistance for seniors' centre governance as well as issues around funding.

On the issue of funding in particular, we would like to express our concern about the loss of the Community Lottery Boards. Numerous groups and programs assisting seniors may be negatively impacted by this change, as we have found that funding from the Community Facility Enhancement program and Wild Rose Foundation may be too restrictive to help support current programming. We are recommending an alternative method of funding in our report.

...cont.

By jointly studying this important issue, each of us has become more informed of the issues facing seniors' centres today and in preparation for the future. We have appreciated this opportunity. Through our work we have been able to bring together perspectives from a variety of backgrounds and we encourage you to continue using this model of collaborative study.

We would like to meet with you, at your convenience, in order to discuss the findings of our report. Thank you again for the opportunity to examine this important issue.

Yours truly,

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Executive Summary

In November 2000, Honourable Stan Woloshyn, Minister for Seniors, agreed that the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta and the Alberta Council on Aging would conduct a study of seniors' centers.

The Study Group was composed of three representatives from the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta and three representatives from the Alberta Council on Aging Policy Advisory Network. It was co-chaired by one representative of the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta and one representative of the Alberta Council on Aging Policy Advisory Network. Alberta Seniors provided project staff and technical support.

The purpose of the Seniors' Centres Study was to develop an understanding of the current situation for seniors' centres in Alberta and to examine the role and sustainability of seniors' centres in the future. The goal of the Seniors' Centres Study was to develop observations and recommendations around the current and future role and needs of seniors' centres.

To help the Study Group gather appropriate information on the issues that are impacting seniors' centres now, and in the future, the Study Group collected input from seniors' centres in a number of ways.

- Seniors' clubs and seniors' centres were sent a survey asking a number of questions about their governance, financing, volunteers, current and anticipated challenges.

- A select sample of clubs received a longer survey and telephone interview, intended to explore significant issues in more depth.

- The Study Group conducted ten focus groups around Alberta to discuss the issues facing seniors' centres from the perspectives of the centres, current users and possible future users.

The recommendations are directed to seniors' centres, municipal governments and the Government of Alberta. They address: current and future needs assessments; fund-raising and organizational tools; and, funding.

Highlights from the research found that:

- Volunteers are critical for the ongoing operation of seniors centres. 131 centres reported that volunteers support their work – with an average of 66.6 volunteers per centre.
- Seniors' centres face a challenge attracting members. Of 159 centres providing information on membership, an overall total of 27,765 members across the province was reported, an average of 175 members per centre reporting. These membership numbers also include a number of people below the age of 65. The total Alberta population of people over 65 is 316,000. These data indicate that ten percent of Alberta's seniors are committed members of a seniors' centre.
- Seniors' centres provide services to non-members as well. Eighty-six centres provided estimates of the number of non-members who access their programs and services on an annual basis reporting an average of 290 non-member users per year. The average number of non-members users exceeds the average number of members by almost 66 per cent.
- Funding provided by federal and provincial governments supports program start-up costs, but ongoing program sustainability may be threatened by a lack of consistent, ongoing funding. As well, seniors' centres face additional fiscal pressures as costs rise to support salaries, office and administration costs, and facility maintenance.
- Based on the amount of funding by source, the largest single annual source of funding for centres is gaming funds, which provide $2.7m, followed by municipal funding which provides $0.95m, other funding sources which provide $0.7m and members' and program fees which provide $0.6m.
- Centres located in Edmonton and Calgary predict that future expenditures will increase more than revenues. Mid-size urban and rural centres anticipate a more equal balance between revenues and expenditures.

Recommendations

The Study Group recommends that Seniors' Centres of Alberta:

- Establish a voluntary umbrella association or network of seniors' centres to identify and disseminate information in areas such as best programs and activities and to give advice, support and guidance to the operation of seniors' centres.
- Establish a regular review of their clients' (members and non-members) current needs and expectations; and, develop an understanding of clients' future needs and changing expectations.
- Establish a regular review of programs and services to ensure that the needs of their clients are being met, as well as ensuring that centre programs and services are sustainable, flexible, and remain responsive to these needs.
- Improve communication and networking with other service agencies to better coordinate activities and programs and to reduce overlaps and duplication of services.
- Explore opportunities for temporary or long-term partnerships with the non-profit sector as well as the private sector, which could improve the sharing of resources such as facilities, staff, and other costs, between other agencies and seniors' centres.

The Study Group recommends that the municipal governments of Alberta:

- Enhance cooperation with adjoining municipalities in planning for seniors' needs. Rural areas especially are encouraged to establish a seniors' services area coordinator and to share community resources and services.
- Increase their focus on programming for seniors through their Family and Community Supports Services (FCSS) offices.
- Give consideration to identifying the needs of isolated seniors and the current capacity of any existing outreach programs to meet these needs.
- Ensure better use is made of multi-purpose community facilities to address the needs of the community.

The Study Group recommends that the Government of Alberta:

- Assist with the development of a fundraising manual in consultation with the Alberta Council on Aging and the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta.
- Assist with the development of voluntary guidelines for senior centre operations in consultation with the Alberta Council on Aging and the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta.
- Explore options for a source of continuing funding for ongoing projects, initiatives, facility maintenance and centre administration.

Introduction

A key component of successful aging is for seniors to have opportunities to contribute to the life of their communities and to be active and involved in events and programs that enhance their well-being, dignity and independence. Seniors' centres are a part of the continuum of services available to seniors in their communities. As Alberta's population ages, it is important for seniors' centres to plan and prepare for the active and important role seniors will continue to play. The centres need to remain viable and dynamic organizations in order to meet the needs of current and future seniors.

In November 1996, the Minister responsible for Seniors agreed to review a number of issues in consultation with seniors. The first cooperative study was completed in July 1999 with the submission of the *Seniors' Shelter Costs Final Report* to the Minister. The second issue to be studied, seniors' centres, was agreed to by the Minister and the Policy Advisory Network of the Alberta Council on Aging in November 2000.

The Seniors' Centres Study is a cooperative study between the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta and the Alberta Council on Aging. The Study Group was composed of three representatives from the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta (SACA), three representatives from the Alberta Council on Aging Policy Advisory Network (PAN) and had technical support from staff members of Alberta Seniors. The Study Group was co-chaired by Ms. Pam Bendes, PAN and Ms. Holly Crayston, SACA. The Study's *Terms of Reference* is included in *Appendix 1*.

In June 2000, *ALBERTA FOR ALL AGES: Directions for the Future*, the report and recommendations of the Steering Committee for the Government-Wide Study on the Impact of the Aging Population, was presented to the Minister. Included in this report are three recommendations that discuss the roles of seniors' centres and which supported the need for this study (see *Appendix 2*).

The purpose of the Seniors Centres Study was to develop an understanding of the current situation for seniors' centres in Alberta and to examine the role and sustainability of seniors' centres in the future. The Study considered the programs and services offered by these centres, current funding mechanisms, and the role of seniors' centres in preparing for an aging population.

In Spring 2001, the Seniors' Centres Study Group commissioned a survey of seniors' clubs and centres to help understand the current and future roles and needs of seniors' centres in Alberta. Through these surveys, a series of focus groups, and a review of related literature, the Study Group gathered data for this study. The survey and focus group findings are summarized in this report and were used to help the Study Group develop its observations and recommendations.

Seniors' centres are representative of the communities that they serve. One of the founding principles of seniors' centres is the involvement of their clients in the operation of a centre ranging from involvement in governance, participation in program planning, to active involvement as volunteers.

There is a great diversity in senior centres in Alberta. They are large and small, located in cities and small villages, and in all parts of the province. They offer a wide range of programs and opportunities for seniors, and the centres are organized and run in many different ways. This diversity may be the key to success in senior centres, in that each group can design its centre around the needs and interests of the seniors in their particular area.

Seniors' centres can be visible and accessible facilities in the community that serve a full spectrum of older adults, from those individuals who are healthy to individuals who need vital services to remain living independently in the community. All of these services emanate from a wellness perspective and have the ability to encourage and enable older adults to remain living independently in the community.[1]

A senior centre can create an atmosphere that acknowledges the value of human life and that has a sound respect for the dignity and self worth of the older adult. It can provide opportunities for friendly relationships and be a place where a sense of achievement can be a part of the experience. It can be a place where older people have a right to make choices and to receive supportive help to cope with personal or family problems if needed.

Historical Background of Senior Centres

The first senior centre was developed in New York State about 1943. At that time, the only services available for older people were Homes for the Aged. Recognizing that social agencies had nothing to offer senior clients, social workers from the New York Welfare Department opened the Hodson Community Centre. The Centre began without any clear goals about what services to seniors should be available.[2]

Among the first identified needs was a place to meet peers, to communicate and socialize. The loneliness of older persons and their need for worthwhile activities to fill their leisure time was also acknowledged.

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1 *A Profile of Older Adult Centres In Ontario*, September 1998, Older Adult Centres' Association of Ontario, North York, Ontario.

2 *Senior Centres in Alberta Guidelines for Organization Standards and Practice*, January 1983, Senior Citizens Bureau (Alberta Social Services and Community Health), Edmonton, Alberta.

There was a growing population of older people in communities who wanted a place of their own, where they could meet and be with friends and peers, and where the activities would meet their needs and serve their interests. Centres were mainly developed by older people themselves and run by volunteers. With the addition of paid staff the centre added services such as information, counselling, and other service programs, moving beyond social and recreational activities.

As senior centres developed, they moved from social-recreation to multi-purpose services. The philosophy of the multi-purpose older adult centre, which had its roots in the National Institute of Senior Centres in the United States, was one of an holistic approach to service delivery in a atmosphere of wellness. [3]

The philosophy of the senior centre movement is based on principles that aging is a normal developmental process; that human beings need their peers (as well as others) with whom they can interact and who are available as a source of encouragement and support; and, that seniors have a right to participate in making decisions in matters in which they have a vital interest.

The Seniors' Centre Movement in Alberta

The first seniors' organizations in Canada started in the early 1950s in Ottawa, Victoria and Winnipeg. Prior to 1970 in Alberta, there were a scattered number of clubs, recreation facilities and activity centres across the province. Many of these developed into senior centres with a wide range of services and programs planned to suit the interests of larger, growing and changing memberships.

Some senior centres were established as "drop-in" centres providing companionship, socialization and activities for seniors. Centres have grown, changed and diversified. Seniors and senior centres have an important role in Alberta's future and the challenge lies in recognizing the trends and mobilizing energetic and creative leadership.

Senior centres in Alberta are found in all types of communities and vary in size and activities offered. The kind and variety of programs in each centre may vary greatly depending on the needs of a local community; the interests of the group; and, which interests are important at any given time. Senior centres can have many roles in the community: as a place of social contact; a focal point for providing services to seniors; a place to encourage seniors' involvement in the community; a place to provide activity programs for seniors; and, as a community resource for information on aging.

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3 *A Profile of Older Adult Centres In Ontario*, September 1998, Older Adult Centres' Association of Ontario, North York, Ontario.

Senior centres can provide a wide range of social, recreational, sport and educational activities and programs: cards, games, handicrafts and so on (recreational); dances, teas, socials (social); bingo, raffles, sales (fund-raising); bowling, golf, fitness (sports activities); and talks, classes, libraries (educational).[4]

A few larger ones offer service activities such as information and referral, visiting and outreach to more isolated older people, meals, meals-on-wheels, and home handyman services. These "multi-purpose" senior centres are intended to be community focal points where seniors can take part in programs and activities which enrich their lives and support their independence. Even seniors who are ill or house-bound benefit from these programs, in that the service activities are often aimed at helping and supporting isolated seniors. [5]

As well as multi-purpose senior centres, there are a number of small-scale senior groups, meeting infrequently and including social clubs in seniors' housing complexes. While these groups are less active than senior centres, they still meet important social needs.

Most senior centres are financially independent and raise their own funds, in addition to those which receive assistance from Family and Community Support Services, other government grants, service clubs and private donations.

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4 *A Study of Senior Centres in Alberta Final Report*, June 1988, Senior Citizens Secretariat, Edmonton, Alberta.

5 *Older Albertans 1992*, Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta, June 1993, Edmonton, Alberta.

Vision

The Seniors' Centres Study Group adopted the following as a definition for a seniors' centre:

> ***"A seniors' centre is... A community facility that provides a diversity of activities and services in response to the needs of the local older adult population."***

Beyond this, the Study Group felt that it was necessary to have a Vision Statement for seniors' centres. The vision the Study Group chose was intended to reflect the conclusions of *ALBERTA FOR ALL AGES* (see *Appendix 2*). The Study Group adapted the following Vision originally developed by the National Council on the Aging, USA.

> ***"A seniors' centre is a community focal point on aging where older persons come together and can access services and activities which enhance their dignity, support their independence, and encourage their involvement in, and with, the community. As part of a comprehensive community strategy to meet the needs of older persons, senior centre programs take place or emanate from a facility. These programs consist of a variety of services and activities in such areas as education, creative arts, recreation, advocacy, leadership development, employment, health, nutrition, counseling, information and other supportive services."***

Seniors' Centres Current Roles and Needs

The Study Group learned that there is a wide diversity within and among the seniors' centres. This wide range of centres reflects: geographical differences (urban / rural); size and nature of centre membership; sources and amount of funding; and services provided.

Seniors' centres face a challenge attracting members. The data collected showed that of the 159 centres providing information on membership, an overall total of 27,765 members across the province was reported, an average of 175 members per centre reporting. These membership numbers also include a number of people below the age of 65. The total Alberta population of people over 65 is 316,000, therefore, the data indicate that there could be almost ninety percent of Alberta's seniors who are not members of a seniors' centre.

Results from the mail survey indicated that 82.6 percent of the centres allow non-members to access either their programs and/or their facilities. Rural centres are least likely to allow access to centre programs and facilities by non-members.

Eighty-six centres provided estimates of the number of non-members who access their programs and services on an annual basis. Centres report an average of 290 non-member users per year. The average number of non-member users exceeds the average number of members by almost 66 per cent.

It was noted that the classic benchmark of 65+ as a definition for "senior" is no longer applicable where access to services and existing seniors' centres is concerned. The majority of centres reported that they offer memberships to adults at least 55 years of age, with a significant number of centres offering memberships to younger adults at various ages.

Seniors' centres rely on a strong core of volunteers to operate. Seniors' centres are able to provide opportunities for volunteers, which draw on their expertise, as well as being able to provide the volunteers with tasks that appropriately use their skills and life-experiences.

Funding is one of the challenges reported by some seniors' centres, especially the larger, multi-service groups. The Study Group learned that the majority of funding provided by federal and provincial governments supports program start-up costs, but ongoing program sustainability may be threatened by a lack of consistent, ongoing funding. As well, seniors' centres face additional fiscal pressures as costs rise to support salaries, office and administration costs, and costs associated with maintaining their facility. Centres renting their building must cope with increasing rental and utility costs. Centres that occupy their own building must cope with maintenance costs such as the need to repair aging buildings, the need to enhance accessibility, or the need to expand their facilities.

Both the centres and seniors believe that recreational programs are as important as social service programs, yet recreational programs tend not to be eligible for grants or financial assistance from most funding sources. The provision of recreational programs such as card game clubs, art classes, dancing, and so on, is particularly significant in small rural centres where opportunities for leisure pastimes are limited.

Seniors' centres have stated that they are reluctant to raise membership fees or to impose user fees, as they feel that this might exclude participation by seniors with limited incomes. Almost all centres have responded to the need for increased membership by lowering the age of membership below 65 (the classic age of "seniority").

Rural areas of Alberta face a number of special challenges especially in areas such as the provision of transportation alternatives, and access to services, such as medical and recreational services. Rural areas are also facing rapidly changing population demographics, such as a de-population of younger people moving from rural areas to urban centres, resulting in a rural population that is older.

Seniors' Centres Future Roles and Needs

The Seniors' Centre Study Group's review of the literature and, results of the data gathering, indicated that there are several changes in store for society in the future as the Alberta population ages. There are currently 316,000 seniors in the province, representing 10 percent of the total population. By 2016, there will be an estimated 492,800 seniors in Alberta, comprising 14 percent of the total population. By 2026, it is anticipated that there will be 723,300 Albertans age 65 or older, or 20 percent of the province's population. Seniors are the fastest growing segment of the population, and within this age group, not only will a larger proportion of the population be "senior" but there will also be an increase in "older" seniors (85 +).[6]

These changing population demographics may increase demands on services. It is also anticipated that the next generation of seniors will be different in terms of their economic, social and political experiences. These experiences will affect their senior years as they will have different attitudes and expectations, which in turn will change the way in which services will be delivered.

It is predicted that most future seniors will be better educated and have more disposable income than current seniors. However, there will be a segment of the seniors population that will not have enough income to meet their basic needs. This group may have limited options, and may require increased social and community supports. The same predictors of low income, such as education status, under-employment, and poor health status, are sometimes linked to increased needs in senior years.

Another trend that impacts on seniors and seniors' centres are changing roles of private sector involvement in delivering services that were once delivered by governments and the non-profit sector. One example of this trend is the number of adult housing complexes that are offering packages of helping services to tenants and homeowners. At the same time, people are looking for choices, which means new linkages to services. This trend will likely increase as the next generation of seniors may access services in different ways and have different attitudes to aging.

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6 Statistics Canada, *Population Projections for Canada, Provinces and Territories, 2000 to 2026.*

Recommendations

Seniors' centres are able to respond to the needs of the older adults in their community and to assist in ensuring that seniors are provided with services that help them maintain their independence and dignity.

Nonetheless, seniors' centres face a number of challenges and opportunities now and in the future. The data collected by the Study Group indicates that two of the current challenges faced by seniors' centres relate to low levels of committed members and maintaining program sustainability. The wide variety of seniors' centres must be considered in developing any approach that addresses the needs of seniors' centres. The Study Group believes that addressing these challenges requires a multi-level approach with participation from the centres, municipal governments and the provincial government.

Current challenges

In order to meet the Study Group's vision of a senior centre as ***"a community focal point on aging where older persons come together and can access services and activities"*** seniors' centres need to ensure they understand their role and provide leadership to the community that supports that role. Seniors' centres need to increase self-promotion in order to attract new members, increase program use and ensure the centres benefit from an increased focus within the broader continuum of community-based services.

In order to ensure that seniors' centres are viable and provide valuable services, they need to keep themselves informed about needs in the community, needs of their members, and needs and expectations of non-members. The research indicates that membership in seniors' centres is low in relation to the overall population of seniors in Alberta*. The centres need to find out why and respond appropriately.

A regular review of member and community needs, programs and services, would address questions such as whether current programs are sustainable and whether they reflect current needs. These reviews, and the programming decisions that flow from them, need to reflect the community that is served and take into account what is available elsewhere within the community. This requires increased inter-agency cooperation and reduced "turf protection."

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* A recent study from Manitoba, published after the initial phases of this study, also found that "one in five individuals attended a senior centre in the six months prior to the interview...Only 8 percent joined a senior centre and 13 per cent ceased their participation over ... four years." ("Senior Centres: Who Participates?" *Canadian Journal on Aging*, Vol. 20 no. 4, pages 471-491).

To meet the needs of the present, it is important that the centres focus not only on their current members' needs but also begin to understand, and respond to, non-members' needs and expectations. It is possible that if these centres operated programs that attract a broader audience, or were not "seniors specific," other non-members would come and they would start perceiving the centre more as a community organization like many others rather than a "special club for old people".

Future challenges

Seniors' centres looking forward to the future need to have an understanding of the needs and expectations that will be part of the next generations of seniors. The centres should be focused on this future, and engaged in research now, to develop an understanding of the changes in store for the centres and for society.

Centres need to constantly evaluate their programs to anticipate and remain responsive to changing demographics, changing attitudes, and changing needs. When revenues cannot support a particular program or service, then some hard choices may need to be made.

The Study Group recommends that Seniors' Centres of Alberta:

- Establish a voluntary umbrella association or network of seniors' centres to identify and disseminate information in areas such as best programs and activities, and to give advice, support and guidance to the operation of seniors' centres.

- Establish a regular review of their clients' (members and non-members) current needs and expectations; and, develop an understanding of clients' future needs and changing expectations.

- Establish a regular review of programs and services to ensure that the needs of their clients are being met as well as ensuring that centre programs and services are sustainable, flexible, and remain responsive to these needs.

- Improve communication and networking with other service agencies to better coordinate activities and programs and to reduce overlaps and duplication of services.

- Explore opportunities for temporary or long-term partnerships with the non-profit sector as well as the private sector, which could improve the sharing of resources such as facilities, staff, and other costs between other agencies and seniors' centres. Cooperation between senior centres and other agencies has the potential to reduce cost and provide enhanced programming.

The Study Group is encouraged by the growing number of networks, coalitions or councils developing around the province that are addressing the services provided at local levels for senior citizens. Networking and coalitions of all types of agencies providing services used by seniors, can help reduce duplication of services, increase sharing of resources (both human and financial), and improve sustainability of programs and services.

The Study Group observed that with increasing numbers of seniors all agencies and sectors, including governmental, non-profit, and private sectors, may need to explore increased inter-agency cooperation to meet the challenges of the future. All agencies and sectors will also need to have an understanding of future seniors in order to ensure that they are prepared to meet the needs and expectations of the next generations.

The Study Group recommends that the municipal governments of Alberta:

- Enhance cooperation with adjoining municipalities in planning for seniors' needs. Rural areas especially are encouraged to establish a seniors' services area coordinator and to share community resources and services. An area coordinator could be responsible for services and activities across three or four communities, enhancing access to limited services within the region.

- Increase their focus on programming for seniors through their Family and Community Supports Services (FCSS) offices. Many Alberta communities have chosen to direct their cost-shared FCSS program funding to programs for seniors, including social support programs with transportation services to facilitate access to those programs. The Study Group recognizes the value of these programs and encourages continued commitment to seniors. Local needs should be assessed to evaluate whether or not more FCSS dollars should be directed to programs for seniors.

- Give consideration to identifying the needs of isolated seniors and the current capacity of any existing outreach programs to meet these needs.

- Ensure better use is made of multi-purpose community facilities to address the needs of the community. For example, many facilities and programs are used during the week, but are under-used on the weekend. Facilities such as school buildings and community centre buildings should be adaptable and responsive to changes as the community develops and changes.

The Study Group recommends that the Government of Alberta:

- Assist with the development of a fundraising manual, in consultation with the Alberta Council on Aging and the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta. This manual would include fundraising suggestions, guidelines and standards for preparing grant

proposals, and lists of existing grants, both from government and from charitable foundations, allowing small and varied types of centres around the province access to the information they may need to maintain their viability.

- Assist with the development of voluntary guidelines for senior centre operations in consultation with the Alberta Council on Aging and the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta. This would include information such as a Board of Directors' operating manual, guidelines and standards for bookkeeping, requirements of a non-profit or charitable organization, minimal building requirements, and so on, in order to improve consistency between old and new boards and assist in informing centres about their corporate and legal responsibilities.

- Explore options for a source of continuing funding for ongoing projects, initiatives, facility maintenance and centre administration through a self-sustaining endowment fund. This fund could be supported by a reallocation of existing funds, for example from gaming revenues. Ongoing funding for projects and operations is particularly difficult to achieve through existing mechanisms.

  Recognizing the realities of fiscal restraints, the Study Group believes that this fund does not necessarily require new funding but can be established from existing allocations such as gambling revenues and re-allocated to a protected fund targeted for seniors' centres.*

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* The Study Group suggests that the provincial government establish a self-sustaining endowment fund supported by invested, interest-bearing funds, like the Heritage Fund or the Alberta Heritage Foundation For Medical Research.

A portion of the initial capital and future returns on the investments, could be disbursed through a committee established within the department of Seniors, which might include external representation from groups such as the Alberta Council on Aging and the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta. This committee could oversee establishment of eligibility criteria and disbursement of funds to eligible centres.

Some eligibility criteria suggested by the Study Group include the condition that eligible centres meet certain criteria such as: fifty percent of the centre's board must be centre members; the centre must have been in operation for no less than two years; receive no more than a certain percentage of funding from other government sources; must provide recreational social outreach and/or wellness programs; must limit administration costs to a certain percentage of their budget; and must require a certain level of volunteerism by members. If the centre meets all these criteria they can apply annually for funding from this committee.

Study Approach (Methodology)

To meet the objectives of the Study's *Terms of Reference* (see *Appendix 1*) the Study Group established a number of areas that needed to be considered through research and data collection. *Appendix 3* contains details on the issues the Study Group kept in mind as it arranged to collect the data it required.

The research collected information on the current and future roles of seniors' centres through four major strategies:

- A mail-out survey;
- In person telephone interviews;
- Focus group discussions; and,
- A literature review.

Mail Out Surveys

A database, developed and maintained by Alberta Seniors, was used as the foundation to mail 283 surveys to seniors' centres and clubs across Alberta. Of these, 172 completed mail surveys were returned for a response rate of 60 percent. Two were not deliverable (no such address). Completed surveys from five organizations could not be included within the final data set. These surveys were not considered as they were either substantially incomplete or the group or organization had been inappropriately included in the original mailing.

Of the 167 surveys completed by seniors' organizations, 8.4 percent were from Calgary, 7.8 percent from Edmonton, 3 percent from seniors' organizations that serve mid-size urban communities with populations of 8,000 and over, and 80.8 percent from small communities (towns, villages or hamlets).

In-person telephone interviews

Twenty centres across Alberta were selected to reflect geographic, urban and rural, and demographic factors. These twenty centres received a longer, in-depth survey in the mail, which was completed through the use of a telephone interview. A total of seventeen interviews were completed.

The in-depth telephone surveys were conducted to gain an understanding of some of the contextual issues facing the seniors' centres. The respondents were encouraged to provide both qualitative and quantitative responses and to explain why they provided a certain response.

The seventeen telephone interviews were conducted with representatives from communities across the province from Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray in the north to Lethbridge in the south. The size of the communities that the centre served can be broken down into three types. The list below shows the size of community and the communities represented in the telephone sample.

Small / Rural	Rocky Mountain House, Beaverlodge, Claresholm, Coronation
Mid-sized	Lloydminster, Medicine Hat, Grande Prairie, Camrose, Fort McMurray, Lethbridge
Major Urban	Edmonton, Calgary (7 centres in total from both cities)

Focus Groups

Eight seniors' centres were selected from communities across Alberta and invited to host a focus group:

- Edmonton
- Calgary
- Vermilion
- Camrose
- Medicine Hat
- Grande Prairie
- Fairview
- Thorhild

The focus groups explored three areas:

- The current role and function of the senior centre
- Any significant trends identified over the last five years
- Future goals and direction

Literature review

The literature review gathered information on the current and proposed future operation of seniors' centres in different jurisdictions. The review paid specific attention to best practices as they relate to funding, operation and service delivery.

Portraits of Seniors' Centres (Findings)

Focus Groups

Eight focus groups were held across the province. Representatives from a variety of community groups attended the sessions and provided comments and opinions that assisted the Study Group with some qualitative data. Participants' comments and opinions are summarized in the following.

Focus Group Comments on the Current Role and Functions of a Seniors' Centre

Senior centres are a focal point for socialization and community belonging. For many seniors the centre is their only community connection. It is a place that is non-judgmental, supportive, provides stimulation, and is a place where seniors feel comfortable.

It provides a place for people to get involved in recreation and leisure activities.

Most centres also offer health services such as immunization clinics, blood pressure clinics, diabetes clinics, and hearing clinics.

Focus Group Comments on Trends

Smaller rural centres and some organizations in Edmonton and Calgary have experienced a decrease in membership.

The mid-size communities (especially those with only one centre) have seen rapid growth in memberships.

All centres perceive themselves as getting "older". The proportion of 55 year olds are smaller and the majority of members are 75 years of age or older. This in turn has an impact on the amount of volunteer hours and type of volunteer work that can be expected from the members.

Focus Group Comments on the Future

All centres anticipate that the "seniors to be" will approach retirement differently. Many seniors will "shop around" for centres that provide the service they are interested in. Throughout their active working lives they have had the time and opportunity to pursue many of their interests and will keep on doing so outside of the seniors centre.

Most future seniors will be better educated and have more disposable income than current seniors. However, there will be a segment of the seniors population that will not have enough pension funds to meet their basic needs. This group will have limited options, and will require increased social and community supports. The senior centre can play a major role in reaching out and delivering services to this group.

Many future seniors will not use the senior centre until later on in life since they are already very involved with other groups and organizations.

Health and lifestyle issues will be a growing area of interest.

Education and information support will be a growing area. Many centres are trying to become a one-stop shop for information to seniors. Some of the centres are looking further and indicated they will attempt to bring in the whole community to the information hub and begin to act as a community centre for this service.

Future seniors will be more willing to pay for direct services that they use.

They will be less willing to volunteer. They would prefer to pay for such services as janitorial and hall maintenance, than perform these types of activities voluntarily.

Literature Review

The literature review gathered information on the current and proposed future operation of seniors' centres in different jurisdictions. The review paid specific attention to best practices as they relate to funding, operation and service delivery.

There is a limited volume of literature on the organization and work of seniors' centres. The majority of the literature refers to American examples of service delivery, which do not always link well with Canadian experiences.

Overall, the literature points to a series of trends and developments that will impact on the work of seniors' centres in the future. These major trends include the following:

1. The gradual aging of the population, which will increase the number of seniors who potentially need service and support. Within the senior age cohorts (65+), key growth will take place in those seniors 75 years of age and over.

2. The greater choices available to seniors able to purchase recreational and social services. Seniors will demand higher levels of service and will actively choose where they wish to access these services.

3. A growing gap between those seniors with disposable income to purchase recreational, health and social services and those seniors who live on low, fixed incomes.

4. A continued de-population of rural areas with seniors in rural communities facing key challenges in accessing quality services.

5. Growing funding pressures on seniors' centres as federal and provincial governments shift their funding focuses to emphasize project funding and a substantive focus on basic health and education services, with an associated de-funding of social and recreational programs.

Survey Results

Charitable Status

A number of funding sources require registration as a not-for-profit or charitable organization in order to be eligible for funding. As well, a society that is registered as a charitable organization under *the Income Tax Act* is able to provide tax-deductible receipts for donations. All of the centres surveyed, reported that they were incorporated as not-for-profit societies under provincial legislation and 60.5 percent of centres reported they had charitable status (registered charitable organization under the *Income Tax Act*).

Table 1 Charitable Status under the Income Tax Act

	Percentage reporting Charitable Status	Number of Respondents
Small / rural	56.3	76
Mid-sized	80.0	4
Calgary	57.1	8
Edmonton	100.0	13

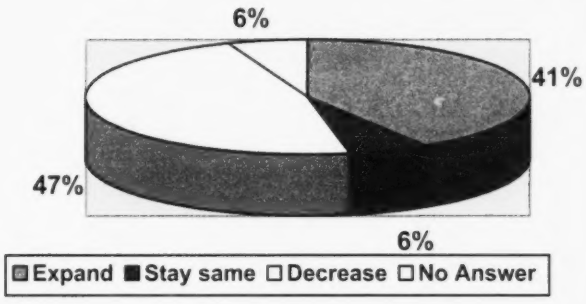
Buildings and Facilities

Less than half of the respondents to the telephone survey indicated they anticipate a change in the size or ownership of the buildings they occupy over the next five years. Some of the larger organizations are looking to expand their facilities or find new space but smaller and more rural centres are not looking at expanding their buildings. Most of the centres surveyed, indicated that increases in expenditures over the past years have

been directly related to costs associated with maintaining their building, for example, utilities and general maintenance. Therefore, centres are very reluctant to expand their buildings or facilities even if their projected programming indicates they may require more space in the future.

Another factor related to facilities is revenue that is generated through rental services. Most of the centres rent one or more of their facilities, in particular their halls, to community organizations and private persons for various social and business functions. This has become one of the major sources of income for several centres, as other revenue has decreased or ceased to exist. In order to be competitive in the rental market some centres are looking at upgrading or expanding components of their buildings such as the kitchen areas in order to attract and maintain customers. The graph below shows the anticipated facility trends for the centres interviewed.

Facility trends n=17



In the mail survey, seniors' organizations were asked if their centre included, or if there was access available to, the following twelve facilities: community kitchen, fitness centre or swimming pool, meeting rooms, drop-in centre, outdoor park or garden, arts and/or craft room, restaurant or café, recreation/games room, large auditorium or hall, health care space or clinic, computer lab, and resource library.

On average, seniors' centres serving rural communities include, or have access to, four of the twelve facilities, centres in mid-size communities six facilities, and centres in Edmonton and Calgary 6.8 facilities.

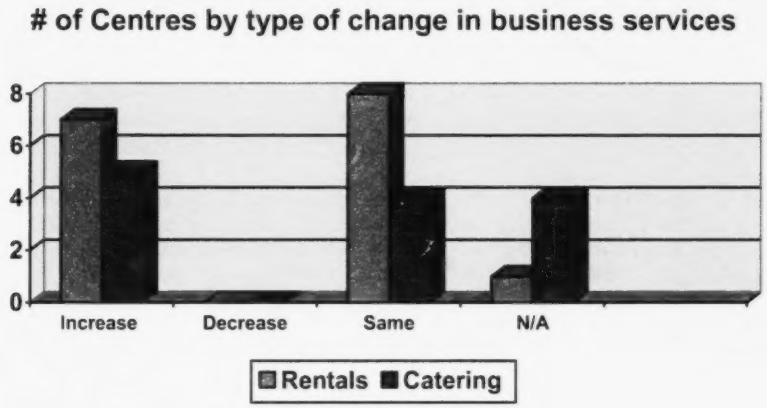
The most common facilities centres either include, or have access to, are: a drop-in centre (90.4 percent), a recreation or games room (77.2 percent), and meeting rooms (70.7 percent).

Table 2 Access to Twelve Facilities

	Percentage reporting	Number of Respondents
1 to 3 facilities	31.7	53
4 to 6 facilities	48.5	81
7 to 9 facilities	16.2	27
10 to 12 facilities	3.6	6

Business Services

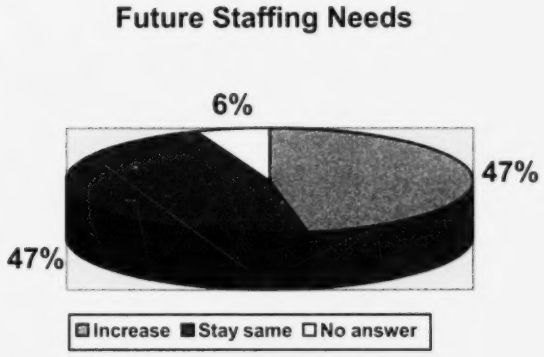
When asked in the telephone survey to indicate if there was any anticipated change in business services offered, such as facility rentals and catering, most centres indicated it would either increase or stay the same. Rentals of the facility are a major source of income for many centres. Some facilities are hesitant to increase this portion since it often means that regular programming has to be cancelled or moved to accommodate the external user. Some seniors' centres have made a conscious effort to ensure that the rental of the facility does not impact on the regular programming. Other facilities are at the maximum in terms of their capacity to rent out and if they increased this portion, regular programming would have to be decreased.



Staff and Volunteers

Even though the majority of the centres responding to the telephone survey indicated they had a reduction in staffing in the past five years, they are more optimistic as they predict the future. None of the respondents foresee any future reduction in number of staff. Close to half indicate they will have to increase staffing, primarily in program delivery

areas, due to more programs being offered. The remaining centres see no change over the next five years. The graph below shows anticipated future staffing changes.



From the mail surveys, 42 centres report paid staff positions – and employ a total of 85.6 FTE (full-time equivalent) staff.

Table 3 Paid Staff

	Percentage reporting	Number of Respondents	Average # of FTE Staff
Small / rural	13.0	18	1.0
Mid-sized	80.0	4	1.6
Calgary & Edmonton	74.1	20	3.1

131 centres report that volunteers support their work – with an average of 66.6 volunteers per centre.

Table 4 Volunteers

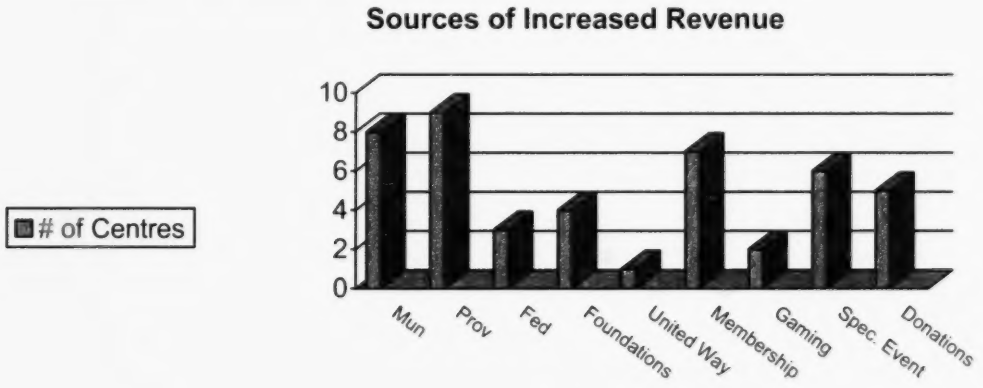
	Percentage reporting	Number of Respondents	Average # of volunteers per centre
Small / rural	77.8	105	42.5
Mid-sized	80.0	4	284
Calgary & Edmonton	81.5	22	142.1

Funding, Revenues and Expenditures

Annual Revenues

As many centres struggle with an anticipated increase in expenditures, they are looking to public funding as the major source for future increases in revenues. Twelve of the seventeen centres in the telephone interview indicated they will require additional revenues in order to offset the increase in expenditures. Another four believed their revenues would stay the same. These four are smaller centres that currently have a surplus budget on an annual basis and can absorb an increase in expenditures.

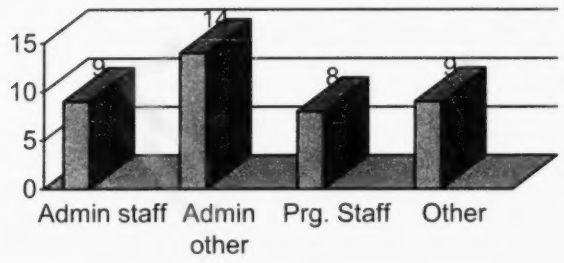
All of the centres that indicated a need for an increase in future revenues are anticipating that their future source for increased revenues will come from one or more of the three levels of government, the most likely being local or provincial funding. Some of the larger centres are also looking for increased revenues through membership fees. This is a reflection of anticipated increased numbers of members, not an increase in fees. Grants from Alberta's gaming industry are not anticipated to be a likely source for future funding. The graph below shows the anticipated funding source and the number of centres who believe their increased revenues will come from this source.



Annual Expenditures

From the seventeen telephone interviews, fifteen centres (88 percent) are anticipating an increase in annual expenditures. The major component of this increase is anticipated to come from program administration and maintenance, operation of facilities, and general upkeep of buildings. The graph below shows the number of centres, and the anticipated areas where increased expenditures will occur.

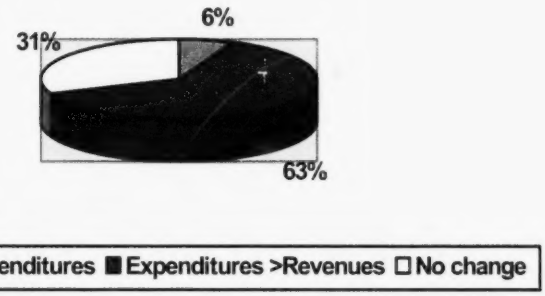
Anticipated areas of expenditure increase
n=17



Balance Between Revenues and Expenditures

When asked to project what the future balance will be between revenues and expenditures the majority of telephone respondents indicated that expenditures will increase more than revenues. Centres located in Edmonton and Calgary were most likely to predict this balance. Mid-size and rural centres appear to anticipate a more equal balance between revenues and expenditures. Only one centre indicated that their anticipated change (increase) in revenues would be greater than the anticipated change (increase) in expenditures. This is due to the fact that the centre is already operating a deficit budget and is focusing its efforts on balancing the budget over the next couple of years.

Anticipated Changes in Revenue & Expenditures



Centre Funding

In the mail survey, 105 (62.9 percent) centres reported some information on annual sources of funding.

Table 5 Annual Revenues

	Percentage reporting	Number of Respondents	Average reported annual revenues
Small / rural	61.5	83	$12,719
Mid-sized	60.0	3	$173,654
Calgary & Edmonton	74.0	20	$171,995

Most seniors' centres report revenues are received from sources such as membership and program fees, donations and special events. However, based on the amount of funding by source, the largest single annual source of funding for centres is gaming, which provides $2.7m, followed by municipal funding which provides $0.95m, other funding sources which provide $0.7m and members' and program fees which provide $0.6m.

Table 6 Sources of funding

	Percentage reporting	Number of Respondents
Membership and Program Fees	100.0	105
Donations	68.6	72
Special events	64.7	68
Other	65.7	69

The four main funding sources for centres which serve rural communities are other funding sources ($0.3m), gaming ($0.24m), municipal government ($0.14m) and special events ($0.12m).

The four main funding sources for centres in mid-size communities are gaming revenues ($174,000), provincial funding ($75,000), foundations and service clubs ($70,000) and other funding sources ($61,000).

The four main funding sources for centres in Calgary and Edmonton are municipal government ($0.75m), members' and program fees ($0.5m), gaming revenues ($0.5m) and special events/fundraising ($0.39m).

Centre Annual Expenses

In the mail survey, 42.5 percent of responding centres provided an estimate of their annual expenses by area of major cost.

Table 7 Expenses

	Percentage of expenditures
Non-staffing administration costs	57.3
Non-staffing program costs	27.2
Administration staffing costs	7.4
Program staffing costs	6.3

Membership

None of the centres interviewed anticipate a decrease in their membership. Rural centres indicated they anticipate that the membership level would remain the same whereas mid-sized and urban centres are expecting a growth in total numbers of members. Furthermore, the majority of centres also expect an increase in non-member usage of the centre.

From the mail survey, 97 percent of centres reported that they offer memberships and 1.8 percent that they do not offer memberships (1.2 percent did not answer).

The majority of centres (60 percent) offer memberships to adults 55 years of age and over, 16.1 percent offer memberships to adults 50 years of age and over, while 11.6 percent offer memberships to all adults regardless of age.

The average annual cost of a single membership in a centre is $8.18 with a range of $0 to $35. Fifty-four centres offer memberships to couples with an average annual cost of $17.32 and a range of $0 to $40.

The number of centre members varies significantly from centre to centre. Overall 159 centres reported information on the total number of members. These centres reported a total of 27,765 members across the province with an average membership per centre of 175. The range of members across centres was from 7 to an estimated 4,000.

Information on the age profile of their members was provided by 133 centres. The majority of members were either 65 to 74 years of age (42.4 percent) or 75 to 84 years of age (35.9 percent). 15.8 percent of centre members were less than 65 years of age with the remaining 6.0 percent 85 years of age and over.

Table 8 Membership Profiles

	Small / rural	Mid-sized	Calgary & Edmonton
Average membership costs			
Single	$7.56	$15.50	$10.20
Couple	$16.41	N/A*	$20.15
Average number of members	83	347	601
Range of member numbers	7 to 357	74 to 620	70 to 4,000
Age profiles			
Under 65	16.4 percent	N/A**	13.3 percent
65 to 74	43.4 percent	N/A**	38.1 percent
75 to 84	34.7 percent	N/A**	39.4 percent
85 and over	5.3 percent	N/A**	9.2 percent

* No data provided by reporting centres

** Only two centres serving mid-size communities reported data on the age profile of their members.

Non-Member Centre Access

In the mail survey, 82.6 percent of the centres allow non-members to access either their programs and/or their facilities. Rural centres are least likely to allow access to centre programs and facilities by non-members.

Eighty-six centres provided estimates of the number of non-members who access their programs and services on an annual basis. Centres report an average of 290 non-member users per year.

Programs

Based on current patterns of programs, services and facility use, centres identified the major areas of centre use. Among centres that serve rural communities 85.9 percent received most visits for recreation programs, as did 72 percent in Calgary and Edmonton, and all centres in mid-size communities.

Anticipated Future Program Use

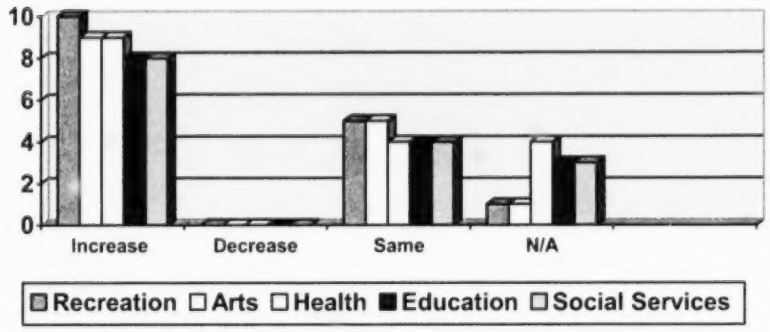
The respondents in the telephone interview were asked to indicate if they anticipated any changes in their program areas and services. The centres were asked to respond to four major areas: informal programming, formal programming, community outreach programs, and business services. Within each of these areas there were 5-6 program types. The respondents were asked to

indicate if they anticipated the program area would increase, stay the same, or decrease in activity.

Informal Programs (no registration required)

As can be seen from the graph below most centres anticipate an increase in all types of informal program areas. The rationale for this increase was attributed to an increase in total membership, more non-members accessing programs, and a general increase in the total number of seniors in their community. No centre indicated it anticipated a decrease. Smaller centres that have experienced a decrease in their membership over the last few years anticipate that their programs will remain the same.

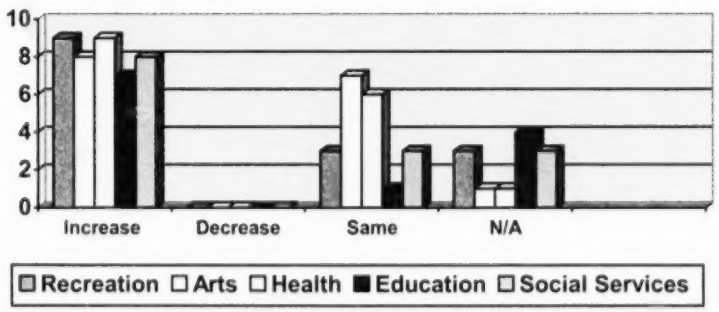
# of Centres by type of change for informal programs



Formal Programs (registration required)

The anticipated changes for formal programs mirror the responses for informal programs. The majority of centres anticipate an increase in formal programs. In particular mid-sized communities that are served primarily by one seniors' centre have indicated their future will involve more programs. One rationale for this is a higher demand from members. Demand for active living types of programs as well as prevention programs is anticipated to increase.

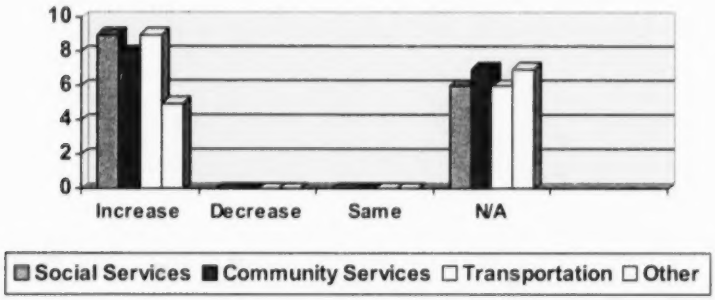
# of Centres by type of change for formal programs



Community Outreach Programs

Centres were asked to indicate if they anticipated any future changes in specific programs such as community services, transportation services or other. As can be seen from the graph below there are only two types of responses. Those who are already offering this type of response see an increase for the services. The rationale for the increase is indicated to be the aging population, increased need for outreach to isolated seniors, higher need for mental health services and the need to address local transportation issues for seniors. Other centres indicate it is not applicable since they do not offer the service now nor do they anticipate offering it in the future.

# of Centres by type of change in outreach programs



Recent Trends in Centre Operations and Activities (Summary)

In the mail survey, 164 centres reported information on various changes in centre operations and activities over the last five years. Table 9 summarizes the information provided by size of community and types of changes by activity.

Table 9 Summary of recent trends

	All Centres		Small / rural		Mid-sized		Calgary & Edmonton	
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
Facility changes in last 5 years	**100.0**	**164**						
No changes	**53.7**	**88**	56.8	75	60.0	3	37.0	10
Expanded facility	**29.9**	**49**	24.2	32	*--	--	55.6	15
Decreased facility	**16.5**	**27**	18.9	25	40.0	2	7.4	2
Number of Volunteers	**100.0**	**153**						
No changes	**42.5**	**65**	48.8	59	--	--	14.8	4
Increased volunteers	**26.8**	**41**	19.8	24	--	--	55.6	15
Decreased volunteers	**30.7**	**47**	31.4	38	--	--	29.6	8
Revenue changes in last 5 years	**100.0**	**159**						
No changes	**31.5**	**50**	34.6	44	--	--	22.2	6
Increase	**39.6**	**63**	35.4	45	40	2	59.3	16
Decrease	**28.9**	**46**	29.9	38	60	3	18.5	5
Expenditure changes in last 5 years	**100.0**	**163**						
No changes	**17.3**	**28**	--	--	--	--	--	--
Increase	**76.5**	**124**	--	--	--	--	--	--
Decrease	**3.0**	**5**	--	--	--	--	--	--
Membership changes in last 5 years	**100.0**	**159**						
No changes	**26.4**	**42**	28	36	20	1	18.5	5
Increase	**27.7**	**44**	22.0	28	40	2	51.9	14
Decrease	**45.9**	**73**	49.6	63	40	2	29.6	8

*-- Data not available

	All Centres		Small / rural		Mid-sized		Calgary & Edmonton	
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
Non-Member utilization of facilities and programs	**100.0**	**158**						
No changes	**51.9**	**82**	--	--	--	--	--	--
Increase	**32.3**	**51**	26.0	33	40.0	2	61.5	16
Decrease	**7.0**	**11**	--	--	--	--	--	--
No service to non-members	**8.9**	**14**	--	--	--	--	--	--
Informal Program changes	**100.0**	**144**						
No changes	**51.4**	**74**	--	--	--	--	--	--
Increase	**33.3**	**48**	29.0	33	25.0	1	53.9	14
Decrease	**4.9**	**7**	--	--	--	--	--	--
Formal Program changes	**100.0**	**84**						
No changes	**53.6**	**45**	--	--	--	--	--	--
Increase	**41.7**	**35**	30.4	17	67.0	2	64.0	16
Decrease	**4.8**	**4**	--	--	--	--	--	--
Community Outreach	**100.0**	**58**						
No changes	**41.4**	**24**	--	--	--	--	--	--
Increase	**48.3**	**28**	--	--	--	--	--	--
Decrease	**10.3**	**6**	--	--	--	--	--	--
Additional Services	**100.0**	**73**						
No changes	**37.0**	**27**	--	--	--	--	--	--
Increase	**53.4**	**39**	--	--	--	--	--	--
Decrease	**9.6**	**7**	--	--	--	--	--	--

*-- Data not available

Appendix 1

Seniors' Centres Study
Terms of Reference

Preamble

After the November 1996 release of the *Review of Cumulative Impact of Program and Service Changes*, the Minister responsible for Seniors agreed to review a number of issues in consultation with seniors - health costs; federal and provincial taxes; municipal changes; Alberta Seniors Benefit; homeowners' costs; incomes of seniors not eligible for the full Alberta Seniors Benefit; seniors' centres; intergenerational transfers; native seniors; and support for caregivers.

The first cooperative study was completed in July 1999 with the submission of the *Seniors' Shelter Costs Final Report* of the Cumulative Impact Shelter Costs Study Group to the Minister.

The second issue to be studied, seniors' centres, was agreed to by the Minister and the Policy Advisory Network of the Alberta Council on Aging in November 2000.

In June 2000, *ALBERTA FOR ALL AGES: Directions for the Future*, the report and recommendations of the Steering Committee for the Government-Wide Study on the Impact of the Aging Population was presented to the Minister. Included in this report are three recommendations that discuss the roles of seniors' centres.

Purpose

The purpose of the Seniors' Centres Study is to develop an understanding of the current situation for seniors' centres in Alberta and to examine the role and sustainability of seniors' centres in the future. The Seniors' Centres Study will develop some observations and recommendations to be presented to the Minister responsible for seniors.

Objectives

The Study Group will:

- Identify and review the services and programs currently provided by Alberta's seniors' centres;
- Develop a definition of seniors' centres;
- Develop an understanding of any possible gaps in services and the reasons behind these gaps;

- Examine the client base and utilization of seniors' centres' services in order to establish the role of seniors' centres in the seniors' community and within the continuum of other local agencies;
- Develop an awareness of best practices, ways to enhance seniors' centres' roles in their communities, and increase knowledge of the services they provide;
- Review current funding for seniors' centres;
- Examine the future role of seniors' centres in the context of an aging population by predicting the characteristics and expectations of the next generation of seniors;
- Report to the Minister of Community Development and Minister responsible for Seniors providing the Minister with options and recommendations for an appropriate response from government to the needs of seniors' centres as they prepare for an aging population.

Membership

The Study Group is composed of three representatives of the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta and three representatives of the Alberta Council on Aging Policy Advisory Network. Members are responsible for informing their respective organizations of the progress of the study group.

Representing the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta:

- Ms. Holly Crayston, Calgary
- Ms. Ellen Kemp, Millet
- Mr. Harry Long, Leduc

Representing the Alberta Council on Aging Policy Advisory Network

- Ms. Pam Bendes, Edmonton
- Mr. Jim Hogg, Medicine Hat
- Ms. Doreen Morton, Edmonton

The Study Group will be co-chaired by one representative of the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta and one representative of the Alberta Council on Aging Policy Advisory Network. The Director of Strategic Planning and Policy, Seniors Services and Housing Division, Alberta Community Development* will sit ex-officio, as a member of the Study Group. The Strategic Planning and Policy Branch, Alberta Community Development will provide project staff and support.

** Note: Seniors Services and Housing Division, Alberta Community Development became a separate Ministry, Alberta Seniors, in March 2001.*

Appendix 2

ALBERTA FOR ALL AGES: Directions for the Future

The three key recommendations related to Seniors' Centres in this report are:

5.2. Support and expand community-based resource centres for seniors.

Seniors centres have been established in many communities. These centres provide a valuable source of information, socialization, and advice. Seniors centres can play a role in providing access to education and information about a wide variety of issues including monitoring health and new health tests, support for caregivers, accessing appropriate services in the community, Alberta Seniors Benefit and other support programs. The centres should be easily accessible, offer programs and services that are targeted to the different needs of seniors and reflect the diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds of their community members. Consideration should be given to linking the centres with existing regional Community Development Offices, expanding these offices in more communities, and establishing virtual centres by using technology to link people to the information they need.

5.3. Support and encourage cooperation, partnerships and the use of shared resources and information among community organizations and agencies, regional health authorities and all levels of government.

At the community level, there are a number of different agencies, groups, organizations and levels of government involved in providing programs and support for seniors. In many communities, those different agencies and organizations work together to share ideas, information, resources, and solutions. This kind of ongoing collaboration needs to be encouraged and supported. Better collaboration can result in better communication, reduced duplication, increased efficiencies, and maximum benefits for everyone involved.

5.6. Expand recreational, social and cultural programs, facilities and events for seniors.

A key component of successful aging is for seniors to have opportunities to be active and involved in events, programs and the life of their communities. This is an important way of combating isolation, depression and loneliness. Individuals should be encouraged to be actively involved in their communities. Communities, seniors organizations and other community groups also need to work together to expand social and recreational opportunities. These opportunities should reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity of the community and provide opportunities for all generations of community members to participate together. Government can play a role in providing support for community facilities, Family and Community Support Services Programs (FCSS), and other innovative approaches.

Appendix 3

The Issues

To meet the objectives of the Study's Terms of Reference (see *Appendix 1*) the Study Group established a number of areas that needed to be considered through the research and data collection:

1. **Identify and review the services and programs currently provided by Alberta's seniors' centres;**

   - Number of active volunteers; roles of volunteers
   - Services currently offered by the centre
   - Socio-demographic characteristics of members/clients
   - Governance (i.e. provincial society? Do members/clients sit on the board of directors? Paid staff – how many, roles?)
   - Main activities provided by the centre
   - Size of the centre
   - Type and scope of programming
   - Issues related to sustainability

2. **Develop a definition of seniors' centres;**

   - Define "Senior"

3. **Develop an understanding of any possible gaps in services and the reasons behind these gaps;**

   - Perceived unmet service delivery needs
   - Services formerly offered but now discontinued
   - Perceived gaps between services and members/clients' needs
   - Services which could be provided but currently are not and reasons why not provided
   - What does the centre need to meet its primary objectives
   - Current issues facing the centre
   - Gaps in service delivery

4. **Examine the client base and utilization of seniors' centres services in order to establish the role of seniors' centres in the seniors' community and within the continuum of other local agencies;**

   - Target groups if any (e.g. seniors age 85+, specific ethnic groups)
   - Five year trends in membership/client utilization (e.g. increasing, decreasing, or staying the same)
   - The number of members/clients
   - Rate of participation of local seniors in the centre
   - Utilization of services and size of client base
   - Eligibility criteria for use of the centre
   - Trends in utilization

5. **Develop an awareness of best practices, ways to enhance seniors' centres roles in their communities, and increase knowledge of the services they provide;**

   - Strategic and operational planning systems used
   - Strategies currently being used to monitor or evaluate the quality of service delivery, service delivery results and client satisfaction
   - Total budget/annual expenditures
   - Five year trends in total budget/annual expenditures (e.g. increasing, decreasing, or staying the same)
   - Current sources of funding
   - Strategies for attracting members/clients
   - Plans to expand/refocus services to meet these needs, if any
   - Questions about the centres relationship to/within their community

6. **Review current funding for seniors' centres;**

   - How is the centre currently funded; including the proportion of budget received from each source
   - Operational challenges confronting the organization (e.g. adequacy of funding and relative security vs. insecurity of funding sources)
   - Funding sources for the centre

7. **Examine the future role of seniors' centres in the context of an aging population by predicting the characteristics and expectations of the next generation of seniors;**

   - As the number of Alberta seniors increases what is the role for seniors' centres in the future
   - Future expectations
   - How the centre is positioning itself to meet future needs
   - The future of the centre – what kinds of services does the centre believe it will be/should be/could be offering 5 or 10 years in the future